

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER PROSPECTUS IN HISTORY

Below is a guide for writing a prospectus (or abstract) for a major research project. Although you may not be able to answer all of these questions in your prospectus, you should have some solid preliminary answers.

1. Thesis statement or hypothesis (one or two paragraphs)
 - a. the topic or subject of your examination
 - b. the question you are going to ask about the subject, based on a series of premises about the subject (in other words, the perspective from which you will examine the subject)
 - c. the argument you are going to make about it (this will undoubtedly shift as you research and write, but you need to begin to formulate a hypothesis to help direct your inquiry)
2. Sources: annotated bibliography
 - a. primary sources or documents, either published or located in archival collections: explain why you've chosen these sources
 - b. the secondary literature (historiography), both specific to the particular topic and/or more broadly related to the field of study: explain what these studies offer to your study (e.g., the information they provide, the author's argument and perspective)

NOTE: How to find sources:

Hawthorne-Longfellow Library (see the online Library Research Guide for History 332):

1. on-line catalog (be inventive, but specific enough)
2. reference bibliographies (autobiographies, diaries, etc.)
3. government documents (ask Ginny Hopcroft)—e.g. censuses
4. newspaper microfilm (and indices)
5. for community: F section (Library of Congress): various sources organized by state
6. internet database search engines

For primary source materials, you should check the footnotes and bibliography in good secondary sources on the topic. Try to find primary sources that have not been edited and/or interpreted by an historian.

3. Methodology

How you will use the primary sources that you have found.

Are the sources valid and/or reliable for the questions you want to ask?

Note: In the introductory section of your research papers, you will present your thesis question, the premises underlying that question, and your thesis. You should then discuss your sources and methodology. Together these set up the main part of your essay, where you discuss and analyze the evidence that you have found.

4. Projected outline of the essay

Note: In History, we use footnote or endnote format for citations and provide a bibliography of the sources that we consult, rather than parenthetical citations and a works-cited page. For a quick lesson on correct format, see Patrick Rael's Citation and footnote basics; Citation guide; advanced; and or Reading, Writing, and Researching for History: A Guide for College Students on his faculty home page (under "My guides for writing papers") <http://www.bowdoin.edu/faculty/P/prael/> See also the online Chicago Manual of Style: <http://www.bowdoin.edu:11442/contents.html>